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THE PREFACE OF THE "ACTA SANCTORUM"

On the page preceding the text of the first volume of the *Acta Sanctorum*, we find in bold type the following appeal:

Kind Reader, I beg you not to read the following acts or, if they do not meet with your immediate approval, not to pass hasty judgment upon them until you have given due consideration to what I have set forth in the Preface, particularly in the third chapter.

We may infer from this appeal that Bollandus anticipated the unjust criticism from which the *Acta Sanctorum* would suffer owing to ignorance of the design of the work, and of the authority claimed for its contents. Hence in the Preface he explains in detail the plan he proposed to follow, and the credence the events related deserve, thus making acquaintance with the preface essential to an intelligent understanding of the work, and laying down sound principles of historical writing which the lapse of three centuries has only served to vindicate and strengthen. The length of the preface precludes its presentation as a whole; we venture to give the main elements of the second and third chapters, largely in the words of Bollandus himself, in order to encourage acquaintance with the original, and to create a deeper interest in the *Acta Sanctorum*, an "Opus Magnum," too little appreciated and too seldom invoked.¹

The second chapter is devoted to an explanation of the order in which the material is to be presented. It is difficult for us to appreciate the problem which confronted Bollandus prior to the publication of the *Acta Sanctorum*. Before him was a vast mass of undigested material. All this had to be appraised, its value in the work fixed, and then a plan evolved by which it might be presented in the most effective manner. Some of his predecessors in the field of hagiography had followed no order at all in giving the lives, some had followed an alphabetical order, some the order of time, and some the order of feasts in the Roman liturgy, writing the lives promiscuously when the feasts of several saints fell on the same day. Bollandus determined to

¹ "Neither of our own great historians of the Middle Ages, Gibbon or Hallam, have as far as we have been able to discover, ever consulted them." GEORGE T. STOKES in the *Contemporary Review*, Vol. xliii (Jan., June, 1883), p. 78.

follow the order of the Roman calendar,² and when the feasts of several saints fell on the same day, to follow the order of time, as far as this could be ascertained.

First on a given day, I recount in the order just explained, the names of the saints revered on that day or whose memory is in any way celebrated, adding, when known, the place where they lived, and the dignity or office they held, *e. g.*, St. Guadentius, Bishop of Novara in Italy; St. Leo the Tribune, Martyr, in Bulgaria. By this method it is possible to see, at one glance, the saints treated on that day and the order in which they are treated.

Next he placed the names of saints whose lives are omitted or deferred to another day. When a saint has not been duly canonized or declared a saint by popular acclaim, before the process of canonization was introduced, his life is omitted but the name is given. Bollandus admits that he is liable to err and probably has erred in this matter and appeals for correction. The occurrence of several feasts of the same saint made it necessary to confine the life to one day, and on other days to give merely the name of the saint, with a reference to the day on which the life is given.

The Preface then continues as follows:

In the third place come the prefaces, or prolegomena, the dissertations preceding the individual lives. In these I set forth the place in which each saint enjoys particular veneration, where he was born, or where he spent his life, or the place which he has hallowed with his relics. I indicate the time in which he lived, from definite proofs where they are available. I establish the public recognition of his sanctity, from the acts of canonization, from Martyrologies, the testimony of ancient writers, churches dedicated to his memory, authorized translations of relics and from other remains. I mention by whom the life was written, at what time, by whom it was approved and cited, and from whom it

² This order is opposed by L. Duchesne in the *Bull. Critique* (June, 1888): "Le premier obstacle, c'est l'ordre même de la publication, qui suit le calendrier au lieu de grouper les souvenirs hagiographiques suivant les temps et les lieux. Il est ainsi presque impossible de réunir et de comparer des textes, des traditions, tout à fait analogues de provenance et de formation qui s'éclaireraient par leur rapprochement même. Deux saints du même temps et du même pays, qui ont eu peut-être le même biographe, ou, en tout cas, des biographes étroitement apparentes d'esprit, sont exposés, pour peu que l'un mort le 1^{er} avril, l'autre le 1^{er} octobre, à passer à deux cents ans de distance devant le tribunal de la critique Bollandienne. C'est la loi de l'ouvrage: 'dura lex sed lex.' Dans cent ans seulement, quand il sera fini, les arrière-neveux des Bollandistes actuels pourront y changer quelque chose." The calendar order is eloquently defended by Pitra, *Etudes sur les Bollandistes*, Chapter VI.

was secured.³ On this last head (since I consider it of the greatest value as a testimony of gratitude and an earnest of good faith) I take especial care to publish no life at all, without specifying from what church or convent it was received, expressing also the names of individuals who loaned manuscripts or by their own hand transcribed the acts even of one Saint from the manuscripts of others. Some preferred that the lives they had prepared for the public be brought to light in this bulky work, rather than range about separately as on a fragile bark; to them justly belongs the credit as likewise to those who translated the lives or miracles of saints from Greek or some other foreign tongue. I take especial care to specify what I found in the effects of Rosweyus, and I do this the more scrupulously since there have been some who thought or at least tried to convince others, that no life has been published by me which had not previously been secured by him. Those friends know better who supplied most of the material after his death, and daily supply it. A considerable part of the work or rather the whole of it is due to him, as he collected much material and originated the work, a thing which might not have occurred to me or which the superiors of my order might not have allowed me to undertake.

In the fourth place I publish the lives, in the original form in which they were composed by the authors, carefully compared with the original manuscripts when they were available. If they did not exist originally in Latin, I specify who translated them; where I do not specify this, and they have been translated from Greek, Italian, French, Spanish or German, they have been translated by me. If several lives of a saint exist hitherto unpublished, particularly when written by men of note, I publish them all here unless they are compendiums one of another. When I am in possession of the original acts, I generally omit the accounts of Metaphrastes and recent writers.

To these lives and miracles I subjoin short notes, where the need arises, by which are shown the more important variant readings noted in the manuscripts. If the names of cities or other places occur which do not seem sufficiently explained in the text, I briefly note where they are situated. If there are any foreign words, or words little used and hence obscure, I explain them briefly. If there is any point of time differing from the accepted chronology, or which does not seem quite clear, I explain it if it has not been done in the prolegomena. If there is anything not in agreement with the decisions of theologians, I either give an explanation, or, as far as I may, excuse it, or even point out how it may be corrected. Finally when other acts of the Saint exist written by

³ *Acta Sanctorum*, Vol. vii, of October, Page v, d: "Servavimus quoque religiose et porro servabimus quam sibi praescripserat regulam Bollandus (xxviii) ut quae citaret auctorum loca, ipse vidisset, nihil aliena fide proferret; si auctores non fuissent ad manum, apud quem eos citatos reperisset, indicaret."

other authors or related by historians, in addition to the life which I publish, I advise whether there is anything omitted here or not in agreement.

The advisability of adding these notes was questioned by many, and on the ground that they would be displeasing to learned men, Bollandus was induced to curtail them for the first four days.

Then . . . I began to consider for whom I was publishing this work. Did I wish only the most learned men to peruse it? and not rather the entire body of educated men? . . . If I wished only men like Petavius and Sirmondus to read my works, it would be sufficient to have only ten or twelve copies executed, for there are not now and perhaps for a long time will not be ten men of equal learning.

After a few remarks on the technique and style of the work and the need of a supplementary volume,⁴ a section is devoted to the question of indices.

Writers who frame appropriate indices derive the most abundant and the most gratifying return from their labors. Readers who have not leisure to peruse the entire work determine from the indices what they can derive thence for their own purpose; those who have read the work, are aided by them in finding certain points which they need, and which they do not remember with sufficient accuracy. Rosweyodus promised thirteen indices gathered into one separate volume embracing all the months. The plan of giving each volume its own index appealed more to me, since it is very annoying to be compelled to take up another volume to find something noted in the index. Finally since all the volumes do not come out together, if the earlier volumes were entirely without indices, there would be cause to fear that the advantage of the indices would be little or nothing. There are in all six indices, but they embrace practically the thirteen of Rosweyodus. First the index of saints in alphabetical order, not of all the saints of whom mention is made in the entire work, or in the particular volume, but only of those whose feasts are celebrated on the days which the volume includes, or whose feasts are recorded and set forth by us. Not merely the name is given but the day which is hallowed by his memory is prefixed. Then the rank or state in life, the office or triumph of each is indicated, whether they were monks, bishops, widows, abbotts, priests, soldiers, martyrs, etc., and finally the place which they made famous by their lives or by their deaths, or the translation thither of their relics, or the glory of their miracles, *e. g.*, XIII, Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, in France; XIV, Accursius, of the Order of Minors, Martyr, in Mauretania.

⁴ The need is now filled concurrently with the publication of the *Acta Sanctorum* by the *Analecta Bollandiana*, begun in 1882, and now being resumed by the Bollandists after the recent world war. See pp. 334-342 of this issue.

In this index are also contained the details of authorship and a short conspectus of the life of each saint.

The second is the chronological index, a sort of ~~prelude~~ to the more accurate work on chronology I have in mind. In this are embraced by centuries the chief dates of the saints in each volume. . . . These two indices are prefixed to the work since they afford a guide to readers in using the text intelligently. The other indices are placed after the work.

The first of these is the historical, including the names of all individuals (except the names of saints whose lives are given) found in the volume, the second the topographical, containing the names of places mentioned, with the exception of those generally known, the third the grammatical, containing foreign or obscure words, the fourth, the moral, containing material for use in sermons or moral discourses. The chapter ends with an explanation of the things he purposely avoided in the work, and a forecast engaging in its optimism, of the works he intended to compose on the completion of the *Acta*.

From the third chapter of the preface we learn the historical method Bollandus proposed to follow in the *Acta Sanctorum*.

I promise, [he writes], to publish whatever I have found committed to writing concerning the lives of the saints, to add nothing, to change nothing on my own responsibility, to abridge nothing, but to publish everything without curtailment or alteration, as far as I am able. . . . If there is anything which can be refuted by the universal authority of reliable witnesses, and which I can declare from the whole form and manner of narration, to be invented, I omit it, not failing however, to advise the reader. . . . In many lives it happens that though certain things seem contradictory, they cannot be refuted absolutely, since they are not in opposition to the mysteries of the Christian religion, or other authoritative accounts of approved credibility. I publish these therefore, explaining, as far as I can, what belief they merit.

Since an important element in the trustworthiness of an account is the identity of the author, I shall here set forth of what character I should desire them to be who wrote the acts of the saints, and the character of many who did write, employing a method very liable to error. I shall then determine to which class my accounts belong, and whether men may not justly scoff at what does not suit them, and class it with fables.

To the first and highest category of historical writing (I speak not of those who derive their material from on High, either by direct inspiration of God, or by dictation or instruction through an angel or other heavenly agent, I speak of those who write after the manner common to mortals), to this then, the leading class, belong those who commit to writing events at which they were present and which they

saw enacted. . . . They hold the second place who have not themselves seen what they relate, but have received it from men who viewed it with their own eyes. . . . The third class is composed of those who relate not what they have received from the eye-witnesses themselves, but from those to whom the eye-witnesses related it. In the fourth class must be placed those who have collected their facts from historians who belong to one of the classes enumerated, or from reliable remains of donations, wills, agreements, or from other accounts. All these assuredly deserve credence, provided they are upright men, of discretion, and provided their writings are incorrupt and unfalsified. If you suspect that a man who writes that he was present at an event, was not sufficiently free from the desire to deceive, either because he was a heretic, or an obstinate partisan of the side he advocates, it would be rash and ill-considered to place unreserved faith in him. This is the reason why Eusebius, Socrates, Zozomen, and Palladius frequently are not believed, because they took sides with heretics or schismatics, or certainly with factions and sometimes advance their cause with the pen. . . .

If all the extant writings on the saints were of such a character that they could be reduced to these four classes, I would not have to expend much effort in estimating their credibility. There are some, however, of a worse character so that one might well doubt what belief should be attached to them. All the acts of the saints of old were not written, and of what were written, some have been destroyed, some lost, some corrupted and changed. Sometimes rulers have not allowed the acts of martyrs to be committed to writing and sometimes no one was present with sufficient zeal for religion to secure them or with sufficient knowledge to write them.

This is true not only of the acts of the martyrs but also of the acts of other saints. The deeds of many were not committed to writing immediately after their departure from life, either because envy interfered, or because they were not immediately invoked in prayer, or because the rulers of the Church forbade them to be hastily written and spread abroad or because a suitable writer was lacking. What was faithfully written down in olden times, particularly the acts of the martyrs, was probably scattered and destroyed by the fatal decrees of Diocletian. . . . It must not be concluded that only the sacred scriptures were consigned to the flames at that time, but all writings tending to advance and strengthen the Christian religion, incite piety, and encourage constancy. Since the sacred scriptures were in the hands of many, copies of them could easily be saved, but not thus with the copies of other books which were kept by the bishop alone or by the custodians of the sacred fabric. As soon as the edicts were suddenly and unexpectedly promulgated, Eusebius tells us that hands were laid on the bishops and holy men; the rest could conceal what they wished and withdraw it from the rage of godless men. Much of what survived at Rome and elsewhere perished later by the invasion and devastation of

barbarians, or by the chance burning of houses and town. In this manner many lives of other saints which it is evident were once correctly written, also perished.

This is the reason why the belief in many lives is now uncertain. In the first place since the original acts of the saint were destroyed, but the names of saints survived and were adorned with miracles, it became necessary to write their acts some centuries after their departure from life, either from old accounts or since they generally did not exist, from the mere vocal accounts of the people, handed down by their ancestors. But as Saint Augustine says: "History sometimes lies, but much more frequently tradition." It must be employed, however, when no other material is at hand, but there is need of discretion. When this is used sincerely and carefully, facts are established with honor to the saints and fruit to mortals. It must conduce to the increase of their glory that the celebrated deeds which are on the tongues of men be written down seriously and carefully, and it must be of utility to many to be able to read what saints are revered even in the most remote places, what the opinion of men on them is, and what the memory of their deeds.

After a digression on the subject of miracles, he resumes:

To return to the subject, many lives have been thus written from the folklore, of many ancient martyrs of many of the apostles of Gaul, of many of the saints of the nations just mentioned and, strange to say, of many Italians. The learned men who collected these acts had nothing to follow but folklore, which was said to have come down from ancient times. If they happened upon some ancient document, however meagre, like a light held out to a hopeless man in a dense fog, by it they directed the entire course of their narration. Some, however, make so much of this ancient folklore as to place it on a par with the apostolic traditions, calling old popular persuasions, traditions, though they differ essentially. The apostolic traditions do not rest upon popular report but upon solid proofs, though handed down by word of mouth and not in writing. Popular traditions, however, often unworthy of the belief of children, resting on a slender or even a false basis, are greatly increased by additions but gain little strength by these additions. Even when facts are narrated by a trustworthy man they are wrongly understood by some, and related in a worse fashion to others, so that they travel very far with added errors. It is a peculiarity of rumor that it acquires strength as it progresses, and is more tenacious of the false and the wrong, than of the true and the right. Often what I have related to another returns to me the same day amplified in many ways and so changed that I do not recognize what originated from myself, until by questioning the author of what was related, I learn what was added and by whom. If with learned men of the highest reputation for sincerity, some vagary of thought or some unwarranted interpretation causes this, what will occur in the case of an unlearned and uncultured people?

Some acts not composed from vague, popular rumor but written learnedly and with authority at one time, have been tampered with later to injure the Catholic religion or the character of the saint. This makes necessary a careful collection of all the ancient manuscripts to detect the error. Even if they are in agreement they must be investigated in the light of the teaching of the Church and if there is any opposition they must be rejected.

Other writers have undertaken to abbreviate the original acts of the saints. They restricted the accounts of virtues to a few words, but on occasion amplified the accounts of miracles, including descriptions and explanations which throw the whole account into question. This is particularly intolerable if copyists, without any literary equipment, insert circumstances of this kind or discard what they consider common and trite.

Finally lives have been entirely invented, some, of wicked men, by heretics and some by Catholics as an exercise of style. Heretics have not only corrupted the acts of saints, to claim them for themselves, they have proclaimed saints the most wicked men of their persuasion, and declared their just deaths martyrdom. . . . This is a common form of deceit with sectaries.

Other lives have been written by Catholics, containing not the deeds which the saints performed, but what they could have performed. It has been an ancient custom and it exists today, for men not without learning, to compose the lives of kings and heroes, and relate their wonderful exploits, with fictitious names, in order that readers may be taken with a desire to read them further. This may be tolerated if the names are entirely fictitious, but do they not impose upon serious readers when they attach to a king who is well known deeds which he never even thought of performing? This foolish writing dulls the force of the exploits worthy of praise. To me it seems the height of boldness for men unseasonably funny, not to say impious, to dare thus to trifle with the deeds of holy men. Thus a silly trickster falsely assuming the name of Turpinus, a holy bishop, wrote the life of Charlemagne, thus also the acts of the martyr Reynoldus and others have been soiled by the license of a scurrilous style. There are others not deserving perhaps such bitter censure who offer directions to correct morals and excite piety under the name of a saint in order to give them greater force and cover them with the honey of most attractive fiction to insure more ready acceptance. I do not approve of this kind of writing, since readers form a false idea of saints, or if it is stated that the account is fictitious, suspect that the other deeds of the saint are likewise fictitious, and sometimes doubt whether those who are venerated as saints ever existed. Even if this should not occur, a falsehood should never be used as an incentive to piety. God is Truth.

All untruth is hateful to Him, whether of word, deed or script. Any one who desires to exercise his pen has at hand excellent material in sacred and profane history.

With these principles established, some one may ask to what class of historical writing my work belongs. . . . I say then, first, that there are in this work no lives which any one may have the slightest suspicion of being entirely imaginary, as they are always based on the testimony of some Martyrology, or other unassailable authority;⁵ second, that there are no lives which by any probability were corrupted by heretics or other men with evil intent.

Then he enumerates the various classes to which the lives belong.

1. Those related by eyewitnesses. "These were not deliberately invented after many centuries, but were consigned to writing by wise men who had seen the events, and most faithfully preserved them to our own day. Neither should captious men accuse the monks of being stupid and lazy, men by whose industry, to tell the truth, not only the sacred documents of ancient piety, but all the monuments of ancient learning have come down to us, as even many heretics themselves do not deny."

2. "There are in this work many authors who did not themselves see what they related, or did not see everything, (though those whom we call eyewitnesses did not so carefully view everything that they also did not learn from others), but learned most from the accounts of those who saw them enacted."

3. "There are also several who wrote not what they saw or heard from eyewitnesses, but, since they were separated by a long

⁵ A change in the character of the lives admitted and an extension of the textual criticism was introduced by Father De Smedt in Volume 1 for November (1887). *Praef.* "Quibus in rebus duo sunt observanda per quae hic primus tomus mensis Novembris a multis praecedentibus tomis distinguitur ac reliqui, si Deo placet, distinguuntur. Primo quidem omnia acta et documenta manuscripta, quae de sancto cujus est causa, reperire potuimus, operi inseruntur. Non tantum acta sincera, sed etiam interpolata, apocrypha, et fabulosa, ita ut quidquid de sancto per seculorum decursum sub forma actorum aut vitarum scriptum noverimus, cum lectore communicemus. . . . Alterum signum huic tomo quasi proprio caractere impressum, mutata est ratio edendi sanctorum Acta et Vitas, quam moderni temporis usui atque exigentiae informiorem reddidimus. Quae enim numquam antea in lucem publicam edita fuerant, ea non ex fide unius alteriusve codicis manuscripti quem vicina aliqua bibliotheca aut proprium museum suppeditabat, edendi curavimus, sed omnium antiquorum codicum quos invenire potuimus subsidio cunctas unius textus varias lectiones colligimus, collectasque exemplo principali subjunximus."

distance what they had learned from men to whom the eyewitnesses had related it."

4. "Finally there are many who revised what was written by writers of the above class, in a new order and a new style, or who composed the lives of saints from old and authentic documents, or from reliable historians. These I imitate whenever I do not find the acts of any saint, but only their memory found in the fathers, or historians or martyrologies."

"I do not think that belief in these lives can easily be destroyed by anyone, except that perhaps not a few things may occur to the reader which may be added to what I have published."

5. "There are some lives written from popular report a long time after the death of the saint, or from documents not so authentic or reliable."

6. "The last class of lives are those contracted from the original, or certainly interpolated in various places. This indeed has sometimes been cleverly done by learned men, but I should prefer that they had made separate notes of their observations, additions and corrections, which they have woven into the original account. This class has a very wide range, and like the former, demands a close examination."

Some, the Preface states, do not reject all the lives; they attack the last two classes. They declare that they cherish the lives of the saints, meditate upon them, and derive from them much to excite virtue in their own minds and in the minds of others. But they desire none to be edited that are not carefully investigated and based entirely on truth, which can not only be destroyed, but not even impugned. . . . Men who think thus should devote their zealous labor to illustrating or composing anew the lives of the saints, or rouse up others like themselves, men of sharp and accurate judgment, accomplished in writing, to apply themselves to restoring the acts to their former splendor.

If this may scarcely be hoped, and if by the total destruction of the legitimate acts of certain saints, only those exist written from uncertain popular report, or from legends crudely interpolated . . . and if it is certain that they were considered saints by the consent of several centuries, revered with gifts, votive tablets, and rites by the order, or with the approval or at least with the knowledge of the Roman Church the judge of holy things and the mistress of holiness, what shall we do with acts of this kind? You wish them omitted, or cast into obscurity, or

rather into the fire. Rightly so if there is in them anything in opposition to the orthodox faith or the right regulation of morals. And would that those who are so strict with the lives of the saints would visit with the same censure or rather exterminate very many books which entail a not light corruption of morals.

If there is anything in the acts which is not in opposition to traditional revealed doctrine, and which does not seem to corrupt the minds of readers with the lure of vice, but which is in opposition to all the historians or to several highly approved ones of the time in which the saint lived, whatever it is I allowed it to be expunged or myself made a note on it. But if there is anything which does not agree with only one ancient account, it is not just to prescribe it for that reason, since writers, ancient and modern, frequently disagree among themselves, even those who write the events of their own day, and who are present at the events themselves. I do not see why more reliance should be placed on Ammianus Marcellinus, the enemy of the Christians, or another of the same character, than on any Christian writer however crude and unskilled. Though the latter might be, as they say, too credulous, the former cleverly keeps silence through envy, or viciously minimizes the glories of our saints.

Suppose it were evident that the lives whose falsity you suspect most were written by a contemporary of the saints, an eyewitness of all the events, a good man, a Christian or a pagan, but in the same manner in which they now exist, would you then reject and condemn them? Not at all, you say. But they are written without elegance. But with truth. Simply and without finish. But sincerely. What they relate is uncertain. But see, you say, it is attested to. They should have been cast in a more orderly fashion. The author would not or could not. What then do you think? Should they be published or given to the flames? *Publi hed, I hear.* Some concession at least must be made to antiquity. Truth does not need disguise or adornment. It is sufficient unto itself, to attract good men, bare, and without external embellishment. But the places do not agree nor the dates and writers of the same period do not mention events like this. You will consider that some explanation must be employed or some excuse, as a solution, rather than that you should entirely reject what is clearly evident was composed by an author of this kind. Employ now the same excuses, explanations, and solutions and lives of this kind will have their proper authority and probability. . . . Suppose there is a mistake in a place, a date, or a similar circumstance, must the whole account therefore be suppressed? Even though they are eyewitnesses who make this mistake in the narration? O severe judge! If the law were laid down that it was not allowed for anything false or improbable to be in history, no history would be written, no old writings would be tolerated, except those dictated by God.

You say that heretics will laugh at these things. What then! They laugh at the most sacred mysteries of our faith. They even laugh at

some books we know to have issued from the Holy Spirit; they laugh at many praiseworthy acts of pious people; they laugh at lives written by eyewitnesses the wisest and the holiest. We do not write for them. It would not be difficult to confound their impudence, but they are not worth it. . . . We write for pious and upright men to whom these lives will furnish an incentive to virtue. But all heretics will not laugh at my labor. There are among them certain lovers of antiquity, and hence less removed from the kingdom of God, who will rejoice that many things, however, covered with dust are being brought to light, things which they may use for the improvement of the human literature they are forming, in Italy, Phil. Cluverius, in England, Wm. Camden, Usher, Vossius, Meursius, etc. Would that by this reading their minds may some day be moved to give their hands and hearts and pens to the service of Catholic love and harmony.

Catholics themselves will disdain them. Yes, as people too generously fed with honey. . . . If any have stomachs so delicate that these lives will cause distress, let them refrain from reading them; they have other things to read. All foods do not agree with all guests. . . . The reader has my opinion about each life. If anything does not seem suited to his taste, he can pass it by. . . . If anyone's taste is too delicate it should be corrected, lest if it persevere he should refuse healthful even necessary medicine. Finally, if this argument has any value, how many become weary of sermons, the use of the sacraments, the reading of pious books, and of prayer? Must these then be withdrawn and abandoned? The mind must rather be aroused and turned in the opposite direction in order that it may attain its proper equilibrium. No man who approves everything, no man who approves nothing, can be free from error. Ignatius the founder of our Society, once lost his relish for books which treat of sacred things; he demanded silly books, which dealt with wars, even imaginary ones, and of things suited to the pleasure-loving character of the world in order to distract his mind by reading and beguile the weariness of sickness. When he overcame this disgust he could scarcely be satisfied with the reading of the same pious books. Finally he bore the fruit, to the advantage of the entire Church. This will also happen in this case perhaps, taking its rise from that from which the mind greatly shrinks.

You say "It cannot at least be denied that many ridiculous things are contained in the acts." I am not so austere as to deny myself laughter, or all signs of hilarity, yet though I am engaged daily in these acts, I never remember having been moved to laughter by them. I admit that the stubborn efforts of evil spirits, to weaken the constancy of the saints in prayer and other virtues are ridiculous, but I deny that it is ridiculous to relate them. If any one cannot restrain himself, let him break into smiles and laughter if he wishes. But he must not think that from this folly of his is deduced an argument of any value in affecting these acts which in the case of many more elicit salutary tears as they

ponder on the great deeds of a saint, accomplished by divine aid, deeds of men of the same rank and station as ourselves, cowardly degenerates, though so far removed in time and place.

Granted that they are not ridiculous, surely many things are incredible. Why so? Because they exceed the accustomed range of human events. Are they declared to have been done by human effort? and not by God or His help? What is impossible to Him? If Livy or Sallust related that this had happened, I suppose you would believe it but would declare that it was done by means of demons. Have they more power than the immense divinity of God? So if anything wonderful is related as done by Him, you would pronounce it incredible, if by them you would immediately have faith in it? You say God could do this, but whence is it proven that He did do it? Whence would it be proven if Livy related it? By human faith, I suppose, which has place here. You ask where is my proof that God did anything that is related? Where is your proof that He did not do it? I produce an authority who asserts it; have you one who denies it? If you have, whose statement is more convincing? If you have not, and admit it could be done, consider if it is not rash to deny unreasonably that it was done. You say there was no reason for working a miracle. How do you know this? It is not written. Are all the causes of everything written? One perhaps is given, but it is not approved by you. I suppose you have scrutinized all the designs of God. You do not know, you do not know the goodness and munificence of Him on Whom you place bounds, beyond which it would be unbecoming for Him to gratify mortals.

You fear that these lives will beget false ideas, troublesome errors, and almost foolish superstitions which, once thoroughly implanted and established, cannot be rooted out even when the truth is discovered and proclaimed on the best authority. This fear is groundless. Certain things were lately corrected in the Martyrology. Who did not embrace the truth promptly and without reserve? It is not a dangerous error to be ignorant of the birth or date of a saint, or some particular of his life, some of which details even the sacred scripture conceals. . . . Consider the discussions among the French not on a miracle or two, but on saints who are publicly venerated. Learned men held the opinion that Denis the apostle of Paris was sent to France about 250 A.D. and profess a public veneration for him. Others hold that he never existed, and in his stead publicly venerate Denis the Areopagite. Is this a trifling controversy? One side must be in error. Yet the prelates of the Church are not disturbed, nor even the Roman Pontiff, the head and father and ruler of all, since the error is not of such a character as to affect piety or any other virtue. That holy bishop is not offended because the honors due to him are offered to the Areopagite, nor does the Areopagite attempt to snatch them from him since both know that all honor to them redounds to the glory of God. If some day it should come to light that the people of Paris were without question converted not by the Areopagite but

by a younger man, they will readily give their assent to the truth, released from the darkness of centuries.

This remarkable Preface, which must always have a place in the history of historical method, and of which we have translated only those parts descriptive of the method followed by Bollandus, concludes with the following vindication of his work: "Finally the Church orders that certain lives be corrected and you bring them to light. In what does correction consist? In hiding a thing in darkness, sinking it in the mire, destroying it by fire? and not rather in taking care that what seems crooked and is so be made straight and known so; this is what I do. I am confident that my work will be approved by the whole Church, and particularly by the moderator of all, the Roman See. I designate the lives I think legitimate; those I think deficient and to what extent, and those that should be corrected and in what way, but always with so much diffidence, that I admit it is not often clear to me how the errors I suspect should be corrected and appeal to others to suggest what appears to be more to the point."

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